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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE BIOLOGY OF WAR. By G. F. Nicolai, formerly professor of physiology in the University of Berlin. New York: The Century Company.

In Germany, it would seem, the pacifist-militarist debate has never been carried to the point of obviousness and satiety which was soon reached in most other countries; for in Germany the militarists have had things all their own way, and the militaristic philosophy has been official. It is not surprising, then, that a German scientist, opposing the official and well-nigh universal view, should write somewhat elaborately, somewhat lengthily, somewhat wordily, on themes that now seem to most Americans susceptible of a somewhat concise and clear-cut treatment. Dr. Nicolai, in writing *The Biology of War*, had to deal with fallacies that were taken by most of his countrymen for self-evident axioms; moreover, he had to penetrate the German mind, which is not easily to be reached by direct methods and is somewhat dense to simple truths.

It is to be remembered, too, that Dr. Nicolai is not, like the author *J'Accuse*, a sort of Junius, but merely a conscientious man of science, who would fain have been simply scientific and objective, would the authorities but have taken his views in that sense! The authorities would not. Dr. Nicolai's book was written in the fortress of Graudenz, in which the author was imprisoned because of his anti-militaristic opinions. The manuscript was conveyed to Switzerland, where it was published by the firm of Orell Füssli of Zurich.

Dr. Nicolai, however, in his prison wrote less bitterly to the German people, and of them, than did the author of *J'Accuse* or than Wilhelm Mühlton, formerly of Krupps, both of whom wrote in freedom. He even shows a desire, almost pathetic in its suppressed patriotism, to conciliate popular opinion and to discover some partial justification for the official view. There might conceivably be some justification, he thinks, for a war—of extermination! Yet in no way does Dr. Nicolai compromise with his conscience. Ordinary wars—wars of conquest, wars of nations—he consistently holds have no sound biological reason, and hence no ethical defense.

A slashing satirist, like the author of *J'Accuse*, would not have missed the opportunity to point out that if any war of extermination might justifiably be waged, the German people would be the fittest object of such a war. But sarcasm of this sort is far from the thoughts of Dr. Nicolai. He seems quite serious in his contention that Europe may sometime have to depopulate Asia, though he by no means regards

such a contingency with pleasure and is happy to discover, as he thinks, a more excellent way.

First and last, Dr. Nicolai is a scientist who finds his morals in his science—not a writer inspired by moral passion, who finds his weapons in science and in politics.

Dr. Nicolai, then, labors, with the patience and the simplicity of a scientist—with all the scientist's faith in detailed demonstration—to correct views which in America no considerable number of persons have ever professed, except, as it were, accidentally, in the heat of the Preparedness agitation. His point of view is that of a biologist in the broader sense.

A biologist in the broader, or for that matter in the narrower, sense may have the merit of strict impartiality in dealing with questions of human conduct; but he may also suffer from a certain limitation. It may be remarked that books about the biology of things which lack flesh and blood are sometimes difficult to distinguish from books altogether unscientific. Like works written by laymen, they may, and too often do, treat somewhat fragmentarily and unsatisfactorily of several different sciences, and also of philosophy. And so Dr. Nicolai, not being professionally a political economist, or by training a philosopher, seems somewhat too sure of his biologico-economic deductions, and not quite sure enough of his philosophical thesis.

As to economics, Dr. Nicolai has no hesitation in denying that national well-being increases with increased power of consumption; for, to be sure, "national well-being does not become greater because all manner of superfluous trash, such as oleographs and shell-covered boxes, is palmed off upon the working classes." Property, the author continues, has *engendered* theft and war. Property appears, indeed, to be almost an unmixed evil, though it may be admitted that it has a certain virtue as an incentive "for feeble souls who will not exert themselves save in the hope of becoming possessed of some tangible object." If Dr. Nicolai is not blind to the fact that the "economic motive" is the great fly-wheel of society, he surely means that some other steady device shall be substituted for it—perhaps government ownership of the means of production and government direction of labor. Just here, one has occasion to remember that the only protest—such as it was!—against autocracy in Germany has come from the Socialists, and that the domestic policy of the German Empire has accustomed all Germans to think of state socialism as a perfectly proper and reasonable policy.

If a socialist bent is discernible in some of Dr. Nicolai's rather extreme views on economics, a somewhat uncritical faith in the possibilities of science is noticeable in others. Science, the author gives us to understand, will solve all economic problems, and open the way for the indefinite expansion of mankind. If men do not learn to live in some sort of Bird-Cloudland, they will at least make the earth support vastly increased numbers of men. Synthetic foods— But Germany, one may imagine, will not warm to the idea of synthetic foods for the future. Rats, said one German citizen, might not be so bad—what he dreaded was the introduction of "synthetic rat"!

As to philosophy, Dr. Nicolai reveals a somewhat Positivistic frame of mind—a disposition to keep philosophy and morals within

the bounds that biology can mark out. And yet he has outlined a conception of religion and of morality that is noble and essentially clear.

The road by which the author arrives at this conception is well trodden. Better observers, more competent topographers, have passed over it before him.

War, says Dr. Nicolai, is not a primitive instinct. On the contrary men, like animals, are by nature rather peaceful than warlike. The source of war is property—or, more specifically, slavery (property in human beings), and, later, exploitation. "Whether war really does make exploitation possible is a question. At any rate, this is the object of war, and therefore, if slavery were really abolished, there would be no longer any object in war; and as a matter of fact, *there is no object in it in so far as slavery has been abolished. . . . Every one who defends war under any conditions whatever ought to know that in doing so he is advocating slavery.*" There is no possibility, then, of a war arising out of disinterested differences of opinion—out of religious differences perhaps? However this may be, war is a passing phase in the development of civilization. It made its appearance with the acquisition of property; for a time it had an economic justification; but it soon became, as it is now, retrograde.

An *exclusively* war-like culture, if such a thing were possible, would result in biological deterioration. Men who were adapted through ages to constant warfare would lose many valuable traits. For example, they would probably lose their sense of smell—a worse than useless function to those who have to endure the stench of corpses. They would not become courageous—quite the contrary. War, as an ordeal endured for a high motive, does indeed call forth courage, though it cannot create it. But war as a way of life tends strongly to emphasize "the better part of valor." Even as things are, we see that war does not select the bravest for survival; it kills off selectively the brave and the physically fit, or destroys fit and unfit indifferently.

Perhaps the shrewdest and most original paragraph that Dr. Nicolai has written is that wherein he correlates with certain other human phenomena the narrow and embittered nationalism that has been at the root of so many useless wars.

That we are all members of one body, that we are all parts of the same being, that consequently we cannot hurt one another without hurting ourselves and damaging what is of most value in ourselves—it is in this faith essentially that the world must unite; it is this faith that many are now groping for. Whoever will convince of this truth those who do not already hold it on religious grounds, and so convince them that they will not become pacifists or sentimentalists or vegetarians, will do a great thing.

Dr. Nicolai in part accomplishes this great task. In part he succeeds in connecting the aspirations of men to-day with biological truth. The idea of internationalism is no new thing; the idea of the immortality of the germ-plasm is no new thing—Samuel Butler, for one, worked out its consequences in philosophy long ago, and it is Butler, not Nicolai, who is the discoverer of a biological God. But the conjunction of these two ideas is novel and opportune, and it may prove to be the starting point of a new force.

There seems to be, indeed, a kind of Positivist perversity in speak-

ing of the human germ-plasm as if it were identical with the soul, and in confining all religion to purely human phenomena—as if God had nothing to do with the law of gravitation! But if Dr. Nicolai is too much of a specialist to be a complete philosopher, he is a man sufficiently large-minded and large-hearted to make his learning flow in broader and deeper channels than those of a special science.

THE CRADLE OF THE WAR. By H. Charles Woods, F.R.G.S.
Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

To Americans, if not to most Europeans, the Balkan question, so far as it has entered consciousness at all, has seemed a mysterious muddle—and with reason. How is one to see through a situation depending upon narrow national aims, romantic national aspirations, and bitter national jealousies—a question further complicated by doubtful racial considerations, and by intrigues, interferences, and hopelessly false “settlements” on the part of the great Powers. Turkey, an anachronism; Albania, a picturesque accident; Greece, a contradiction; Serbia, Roumania, Bulgaria, all nations stirred by that urge to a wider nationality which created the great states of the world—a medieval situation bottled up in a corner of modern Europe—what could be harder to understand—or more dangerous?

The Balkan peninsula was the cradle of the war; for though it did not produce the cause for the great conflict, it did supply the occasion. It was, and had been for a century before 1914, a hot-bed of potential wars. And, so far as one can see, it may easily continue to be just that.

The Balkan question, then, is of great importance, and now that America has become, in the true sense of the expression, a world Power it is for Americans to inform themselves about this problem.

In trying to inform oneself concerning the Balkan situation the beginning of wisdom lies, however, in realizing that in all probability no perfect solution of the problem exists. Ready-made formulas are of no use in dealing with so tangled a web of conditions. Either a good many of the old conditions must be swept quite away, or there must be a just and wise adjustment of conflicting interests.

Under these circumstances what one needs is facts rather than theories—not such facts as one can readily dig out of the encyclopedias and the history books, but the really significant facts known to few and understood by fewer. Facts of this sort, cautiously stated, carefully reasoned, are just what Mr. H. Charles Woods has given us in his latest book about the Balkans. In Mr. Woods's book there is a notable absence of political theorizing. The author speaks from a point of view at once geographical and political—in short from a scientific point of view. His, moreover, is the book of a man determined to understand all that can be understood about a complex and obscure matter. He has gathered his information very largely on the spot, and he has weighed and sifted his material in such a way as not so much to display new and attractive political patterns as to reveal glaringly the real difficulties of the situation as it existed prior to the world war.